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ABSTRACT

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Patterns of Volunteer Service by Young People 1965 and 1974

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Prepared for Presentation at the Annual Meeting
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San Francisco, California Apr. 19-23, 1976

Comparable surveys of volunteering were made by the Census Bureau in 1965 and 1974. It was found that the rate of volunteering for 14-24 year olds increased from 14% in 1965 to 20% in 1974. Females volunteered at a greater rate than males. With a level of activity within an order of magnitude of both education and employment, and with an annual value estimated at $7.63 billion, volunteer service deserves to be classified as a major activity for young people. Also, volunteer service offers learning opportunities to young people as well as work experience and career exploration.

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Patterns of Volunteer Service by Young People: 1965 & 1974

by Donald J. Eberly*

In November 1965 and again in April 1974 the Census Bureau conducted a nationwide survey of volunteers. The first was funded by the Department of Labor[1/] and the second by ACTION,[2/] a Federal agency established in 1971 to coordinate federally-supported volunteerism and to operate volunteer programs such as VISTA and the Peace Corps.

Both surveys defined a volunteer as a person serving without pay under some kind of organizational aegis. This definition excluded paid volunteers such as those in VISTA, members of voluntary associations who did no work for the organization, and persons who helped others independent of any organization. These examples are cited because they are sometimes included in volunteer counts.

Both survey instruments were attached to the Current Population Survey. The 1965 instrument had 9800 respondents and the 1974 instrument, 24,400. In order to achieve comparability of data, most of the questions and demographic categories of the 1965 survey were repeated in 1974. Several new questions were added.

* Mr. Eberly is a Senior Policy Analyst for ACTION and was the program manager for the 1974 survey of volunteers.

The two major problems of comparability are lack of complete data on the 1965 survey and its omission of religion as a major kind of volunteer service. Extensive searches have failed to turn up either the data tape or print-out for the 1965 survey. We have to rely on the printed report, Americans Volunteer. The area of religion was not included as a category in the 1965 survey but since it was a write-in entry for 40% of all volunteers, we decided to include it as a regular category in 1974. That the surveys were conducted at different times of the year probably introduces only minor aberrations.

For all persons age 14 and over, the rate of volunteering increased by one-third over the nine year period. The participation rate rose from 18% in 1965 to 24% in 1974. In numbers, the surveys found 24,300,000 volunteers in 1965 and 36,800,000 in 1974, a 50% increase.

While an additional twelve and one half million persons entered the volunteer force, they did so almost proportionally to the 1965 profile of volunteers. In 1965, 61% of the volunteers were female; in 1974, 59% were female. In both years, the participation rate was highest among 24-44 year olds and lowest among persons 65 and over. Also, the strong correlation of volunteer rates with both income and education levels was sustained from 1965 to 1974.

Young persons are defined in this paper as persons 14-24 years old. With volunteer rates of 14% in 1965 and 20% in 1974, young people lagged behind their elders in volunteer activity.

Before looking exclusively at volunteering by young people, it may be useful to compare their level of volunteer involvement with other major youthful activities; namely, school attendance, employment, and military service (Table I). There are nearly as many volunteers as job holders among 14-17 year olds, and two thirds as many volunteers as students among the 18-24 age cohorts. Clearly then, volunteerism is a major activity for young people.

As with almost all volunteers, it is a part-time activity. The survey shows that the 14-17 year old volunteer put in an average of 8 hours per week in April 1974 and the 18-24 age group an average of 11 hours. These figures translate into man-year efforts of 300,000 for 14-17 year olds and 425,000 for 18-24 year olds.

Let us turn now to an examination of several aspects of youthful volunteerism in 1974. Table II gives the population of the two cohorts and the volunteer rate for selected demographic characteristics. The higher rates of volunteering among females, whites and employed persons are typical of volunteerism at all ages. So is the pronounced correlation of volunteering with

education. However, the correlation of the volunteer rate with income is less pronounced for the 18-24 year old cohort than for volunteers generally.

Tables III and IV describe the time spent in volunteer work. About one -third of the youthful volunteers served at least once a week, and approximately one volunteer in five spent 100 or more hours per year in volunteer work.

The kinds of organizations for which the volunteer work was done are shown in Table V. As is true for all ages of volurteers, the dominant volunteer activity was to be found in the field of religion. Choir members, ushers, altar boys, Sunday School teachers, and board members account for most of the volunteers in religion. The survey also indicated that religious institutions were the most efficient recruiters of potential volunteers.

According to the survey, 86% of all young people interested in doing religious work were engaged in it, while at the other extreme, only 32% of those interested in being health volunteers had become health volunteers.

It was noted earlier that youthful volunteer rates lagged behind those of their elders. However, the rate of change for youthful volunteering is greater than that of other volunteers, as shown in the figures below.

Rate of Change of
Participation Rates, 1965 to 1974

Age Group	Male	Female
14-24	44%	38%
25 and over	37%	24%

Only among women over 25 was the acceleration in volunteering below the norm of 33%.

Now, where was this increase in volunteering rates most notable among young people? The above table indicates it was more marked among men than women. Table VI shows that the increase was greatest among persons with some college and least among persons who had not completed high school.

Harold Wolozin has estimated the value of volunteer service, based on the 1974 survey, at $33.9 billion.[3/] For the contributions of 14-24 year olds, he places a value of $7.63 billion. The magnitude of the volunteer effort in the US leads Wolozin to ask that consideration be given to translating it on a regular basis into economic language and incorporating it into the Gross National Product. A recent study by the National Manpower Institute reveals that Japan includes both household work and volunteer community service in its national product account.[4/]

Linkages between volunteer work and education may be of particular interest to members of the AERA. The strength of this linkage is illustrated in Table VI, which shows the rate of volunteering in both 1965 and 1974 to be 3 and 1/2 times as great for college graduates as for persons who did not complete high school.

A more recent phenomenon, one not revealed by the survey, is the great increase in opportunities for student volunteers to be awarded academic recognition for learning acquired through community service. A survey conducted by the American Council of Education and the National Service Secretariat in 1968 found 13% of the responding colleges and universities prepared to "award academic credit for qualified service experience."[5/] A similar survey made by ACTION in 1974 revealed that 54% of the responding colleges and universities were giving credit for community service.[6/]

One example of the service-learning program in higher education is University Year for ACTION, where students give a year of full-time community service and may earn up to a full year of academic credit for learning associated with the service experience. More typically, a student serves on a part-time or short-term basis and integrates his learning with a particular

course in which the student is enrolled.

At the secondary level, several programs have developed recently which offer students opportunities for linking volunteer service and other off-campus work with educational growth. These programs operate under such names as the Neighborhood Youth Corps, Career Education, Action-learning, Youth Challenge, and Work Experience. As recently as five years ago, the problem facing many enlightened educational administrators was to find ways to legitimize such activities. Their adoption has been so rapid in recent years that the challenge now is to maintain a sensible balance between the on-campus and off-campus learning opportunities.

In addition to its value as a learning mechanism, volunteer service has also been suggested as a means of assisting the transition from youth to adulthood. Margaret Mead, James Coleman, Willard Wirtz, Sargent Shriver, and Governor Dan Evans are among the proponents of this idea. ACTION tested this idea in 1973-1974 on a small scale in the State of Washington.

We offered several hundred local volunteer service opportunities to 18-25 year olds. We offered to pay them $3000 in stipends and allowances for engaging in full-time volunteer service for one year. Positions were limited to those sponsored by public agencies

and private non-profit organizations. We did not assign anyone a job. Rather we gave the young people vouchers and agreement forms and a long list of service possibilities.

The results were encouraging. Two-thirds of the participants reported that the service experience had influenced their career plans.[7] In a self-anchoring career progress scale administered by the evaluators, the participants reported progressing more than two rungs of a ten step ladder as a consequence of their service experience.[8] This shows a very substantial personal benefit in career development.

It should be noted that the positive results from this experiment were not limited to maturation. The typical participant contributed service valued at $7000 over the course of the year. The direct cost of the program was $4000 per man year.[9] Also, in these days of high unemployment, it is worth noting the change in the unemployment status of the participants. When they entered service, 70% of the participants were unemployed and looking for work. Six months after completion, the figure had dropped to 18%.[10]

My conclusions from this brief review of youthful voluntary service are these:

1. Volunteer service is an important activity for young people, and shows signs of becoming more important.

2. Participation in volunteer service is a way in which young people may enhance their education.

3. Young people can improve their employability through participation in programs of volunteer service.

FOOTNOTES

1/ U.S. Department of Labor, Americans Volunteer. Manpower/ Automation Research Monograph No. 10, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., April 1969. All references to 1965 data come from this report.

2/ ACTION, Americans Volunteer - 1974, Washington, D.C., 20525, February 1975. All references to 1974 data come from this report or from the computer print-out.

3/ Wolozin, Harold, The Value of Volunteer Services in the United States October 15, 1975. Study performed under ACTION contract No. 75-043-1044.

4/ Wirtz, Willard and Harold Goldstein, The Measuring of Work. The National Manpower Institute, Washington, D.C., August 1975, p. 47.

5/ Eberly, Donald J., "Service Experience and Educational Growth," The Educational Record. Washington, D.C., Spring 1968, p. 198.

6/ Kates, Gene, "NSVP Survey Profiles a Growing Student Volunteer Movement," Synergist ACTION, Washington, D.C., Fall, 1974, p. 18.

7/ Kappa Systems, Inc., The Impact of Participation in the Program for Local Service upon the Participant. February 1975. Study performed under ACTION contract No. 73-043-0037, p. 2-2.

8/ Kappa Systems, Inc., op cit, p. 2-13.

9/ Control Systems Research, Inc. The Program for Local Service: Summary Findings October 1973. Study performed under ACTION contract No. 73-043-0037, p. 23.

10/ Kappa Systems, Inc., op cit, p. 4-6.

TABLE I

Numbers and Participation Rates for 14-24 Year-Olds in Volunteer Work, Paid Employment, School Enrollment, and Military Service, 1974

Activity	14-17 Year-Olds		18-24 Year-Olds	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Volunteer Work*	3,747,000	22%	4,641,000	18%
Paid Employment*	4,294,000	26%	16,230,000	64%
School Enrollment**	15,354,000	93%	6,943,000	28%
Military Service***	220,000	1%	1,435,000	6%
Population	16,675,000		25,320,000	

*Data from April 1974 Survey

**Data from Fall 1973

***Data from June 1974 includes 175,000 persons in high school ROTC and 320,000 persons in college ROTC, Reserves and National Guard

Table II

Number and Proportion of Respondents
Doing Volunteer Work,
May 1973 - April 1974

Age	14-17		18-24	
	No. of Persons	Rate of Volunteering	No. of Persons	Rate of Volunteering
Sex (Total)	16,675,000	22%	25,320,000	18%
Male	8,455,000	17	12,110,000	17
Female	8,220,000	28	13,211,000	20
Color				
White	14,167,000	25%	21,863,000	20%
Non-White	2,509,000	10	3,457,000	10
Employment Status				
Employed	4,294,000	30%	16,230,000	18%
Unemployed	826,000	28	1,809,000	15
Not in Labor Force	11,555,000	19	7,282,000	21
Educational Background				
Less than 4 years high school	16,528,000	22%	5,861,000	12%
4 yrs. high school	-	-	11,089,000	15
College, less than 4 yrs.	-	-	6,523,000	25
College, 4 yrs. or more	-	-	1,848,000	30
Family Income				
0-$3,999	1,167,000	11%	2,564,000	16%
$4,000-$7,499	2,217,000	17	4,329,000	16
$7,500-$9,999	1,522,000	24	2,737,000	16
$10,000-$14,999	3,708,000	25	5,480,000	20
$15,000-$19,999	2,208,000	25	2,652,000	21
$20,000 & over	2,466,000	32	2,758,000	26
Not available	3,389,000	18	4,801,000	15

TABLE III

Frequency of Volunteer Work, May 1973-April 1974 (Percent Distribution)

Age	14-17	18-24
No. of Volunteers	3,747,000	4,641,000
Once a week	29%	34%
Once every two weeks	7	9
Once a month	10	9
Only a few times	31	23
Once only	10	11
Other	12*	14*

*It appears that the majority of persons in the "Other" category volunteered more than once a week.

TABLE IV

Hours of Volunteer Work Done, May 1973-April 1974 (Percent Distribution)

Age	14-17	18-24
No. of Volunteers	3,747,000	4,641,000
Less than 25 hours	50%	43%
25-99 hours	31	33
100-299-hours	15	18
300 or more hours	3	6

TABLE V

Types of Organizations for which Volunteer Work Done, April 7-13, 1975 (Percent Distribution)

Age	14-17	18-24
No. of Volunteers	1,495,000	1,532,000
Health	17%	11%
Education	23	20
Justice	1	1
Citizenship	10	7
Recreation	10	13
Social/Welfare	5	8
Civic/Community Action	10	13
Religious	54	44
Political	1	2
Other	4	5

TABLE VI

Correlation Between Educational Attainment and Rates of Volunteering for Persons 18 Years and Over, 1965 and 1974

	1965*	1974
Less than 4 years high school	14%	17%
4 years high school	22	25
College, less than 4 years	26	32
College, 4 years or move	39	43

*Does not include volunteers in religion